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BioTown™, USA Technology Tested

BioTown™, USA, is one step closer to producing electricity from organic waste. Last week, burning tests were performed on corn stover (waste from corn harvesting) and paper fluff (a paper mill waste product) in a gasifier, one of three processes that will make up the BioTown™ Technology Suite.

The tests were designed to provide quality data such as BTU* value and emissions for corn stover and paper fluff. Early indications are that the two fuels will provide high BTUs with fewer emissions than traditional fuels. Results from the tests last week are expected in approximately 6 weeks.

“Our goal with all three of the BioTown™ technologies is to provide energy from renewable resources, and we believe these tests will bear out the superior environmental quality of the renewable resources we have selected,” said Indiana Agriculture Director Andy Miller.

Reynolds, Ind., is BioTown™, USA, a showcase community where all the energy needs will be met through renewable resources. Announced in September 2005, Phase I of the project focused on promotion, education and increased use of ethanol and biodiesel as agriculturally-derived replacements for gasoline and petroleum diesel. Today Phase I is nearly complete: more than 125 flex-fuel vehicles that have been purchased by area residents, town-owned vehicles were replaced with flex-fuel vehicles that operate on ethanol and the “BioIsland” at the local fuel station which will offer biodiesel and E85 is nearly finished.

Phase II of the project, announced in May 2006, will break ground this fall. Phase II is generating electricity through the BioTown™ Technology Suite. The BioTown™ Technology Suite is composed of three complementary systems: an anaerobic digester, a gasifier and fast pyrolysis. The BioTown™ Technology Suite will be a nearly self-sufficient system. It will take animal waste, municipal waste, corn stover and other types of biomass and turn them into electricity, crop inputs such as fertilizer, thermal energy and biodiesel.

An anaerobic digester takes liquid biomass (waste) and breaks it down to produce methane and a high-value fertilizer. A gasifier takes dry or liquid biomass and “heats” waste, which releases biogas, heat/steam and a high-value fertilizer. Fast pyrolysis uses a lower temperature than gasification to break down liquid or dry biomass to produce heat/steam and bio-oil that can be refined to produce biodiesel.

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* BTU is a British Thermal Unit, or a unit of energy equal to the work done by a power of 1000 watts operating for one hour.